

Blacknall Memorial Presbyterian Church

Policy for the Protection of Youth & Children

Effective Date: December 2016

The staff and leadership of Blacknall Memorial Presbyterian Church (BMPC) are grateful to God for the faithful workers who choose to minister to our children and youth. This is a vital and precious segment of our church community. We strive to support our workers through prayer, training, and supervision. We endeavor to provide an environment for children and workers that is safe and appropriate. The policies and procedures below are an effort to protect against abuse or neglect or false allegations of abuse or neglect.

I. Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to protect children and youth from the risk of abuse by establishing guidelines for those who are working with children and youth, whether paid or volunteers. A secondary purpose is to train adults who work with children to act prudently in order to avoid false accusation of abuse.

II. Definitions:

- A. A **child** is anyone who has not reached the 6th grade.
- B. A **youth** is anyone under the age of 18 who is in the 6th through 12th grade.
- C. The **children's ministry** provides programs and childcare for children.
- D. The **youth ministry** provides programs and mentoring for youth.
- E. Blacknall provides **childcare** for children at selected church events. For purposes of this policy, childcare does not include nursery (offered on Sunday mornings) or events sponsored by the children's ministry.
- F. A **worker** is anyone (including a substitute) who performs nursery duty, teaches Sunday School, provides childcare, or serves as a volunteer leader in the children's or youth ministry. Workers include drivers for events sponsored by the children's or youth ministries.
- G. A **junior worker** is anyone in the 6th through 8th grade who assists with nursery or childcare duties.
- H. A **contract worker** is anyone who is paid to provide childcare. Contract Workers will be over the age of 13.
- I. **Abuse** is the intentional maltreatment of a child and can be physical, sexual, or emotional in nature.

III. Scope:

This policy is applicable to all workers, contract workers, and junior workers.

IV. Responsibility:

The Director(s) of Children's Ministry (DCM) and Director(s) of Youth Ministry (DYM) are responsible for adhering to this policy, following the outlined procedures and training all workers to comply with this policy and the procedures.

V. Policy I:

In order to prevent child abuse or neglect, and false accusations of child abuse, BMPC will (A) screen, supervise, and train all workers who work with children and youth and (B) endeavor to see that children and youth are properly supervised at all times.

Procedures for Policy I:

A. All prospective workers will complete a screening form (Appendix I or II) for the purpose of assisting Blacknall in providing a safe and secure environment for children and youth. This screening form is not an employment application. Completed forms will be submitted to the DCM or DYM and kept in a secure file.

BMPC will conduct background checks of all contract workers and volunteer workers over the age of 16.

To ensure the safety of our children and workers involved in these programs, BMPC reserves the right to dismiss any worker who fails to follow the procedures and guidelines for working with children and youth as stated in this policy, especially the Code of Conduct, as well as any other applicable policies. (See Appendix III or IV).

The DCM or DYM approves prospective workers for service involving children and youth and dismisses workers who fail to adhere to this policy. A worker or prospective worker may appeal an adverse decision to the Session through a pastor.

The DCM or DYM will conduct or recommend an abuse prevention orientation at least annually. The orientation will include strategies for protecting children and youth from abuse as well as protecting workers from false accusations; a review of written policies and other guidelines; and an opportunity to address questions. All workers must attend an orientation, or complete an online orientation. A worker who is unable to attend a regularly scheduled orientation may attend the next orientation if his or her screening form is on file and he or she has read this policy including the Code of Conduct.

Workers who fail to attend one of the first two orientation sessions available to them will be suspended from their duties until they complete the orientation.

B. The DCM and DYM will establish minimum requirements for adult to child ratios consistent with applicable state laws. BMPC's Suggested Ratios (Adult:Children):

0-3 years of age = 2:12

4 years of age through Fifth Grade = 2:20

Middle School = 2:20

High School = 2:20

Visual access from outside the room will be maintained for all classrooms.

DCM and DYM will provide a minimum of 2 workers for all events and programs unless special provision is made as stated in the Code of Conduct.

BMPC will maintain a system for identifying and signing in all children in the infant's nursery through the three-year-old class. Children in the infant's nursery through the three-year-old class will be released only to those adults presenting appropriate identification per BMPC policy.

Workers will document any significant events such as injury to a child, major behavioral episode by a child, or behavior on the part of another worker which could be misinterpreted. Both adults with the group should complete this report and give it to the DCM or DYM. (See Appendix V)

VII. Policy II:

In the event of a report of child abuse, BMPC will respond to the alleged victim, the alleged victim's family, and the person being accused of the abuse respectfully and supportively by following the prescribed procedures.

Procedures for Policy II:

A. The following steps must be taken in response to any allegation of abuse of a child or youth by a worker or junior worker or upon reasonable grounds to suspect that such abuse has occurred:

1. The safety of the child or youth must be secured.
2. The person who discovered the situation will report the incident to either the DCMs, DYM or a pastor and report it to the Child Protective Services unit within the Department of Social Services (DSS), per North Carolina Gen. Stat. 7B-301. The phone number is (919)560-8474, or 911 on weekends/holidays. The report must be made to DSS by the person who discovered the situation. DSS may

conduct a standard and comprehensive investigation, and then decide if police should be called. All workers are expected to cooperate with any investigation.

3. If a child describes to a worker a situation that reasonably points to abuse or neglect elsewhere (i.e. away from the church such as at school or at home), the worker is obligated to report to DSS. We urge workers to inform a member of the church staff and pastor if they make such a report to DSS.

4. The DCM, DYM, or a pastor will notify the parents/guardians of the alleged victim and document the notification.

5. The DCM, DYM, or a pastor will notify the accused person. They will document notification and other follow-up action taken. Notification and documentation thereof will be made by at least two individuals.

6. The accused worker will be removed from working with children and youth until the investigation is complete.

7. The DCM or DYM will ensure that appropriate Incident Reports (appendix V) are completed.

8. A pastor will handle all inquiries by the media.

B. During the investigation of the incident, a proper response toward the alleged victim and his or her family is critical. All BMPC workers should:

1. Remember that the care and safety of the alleged victim is the first priority.

2. Do not do anything to blame the alleged victim or minimize or deny the incident.

3. Make every effort to let the alleged victim, and his/her family, know that the Session and pastoral staff are taking the allegations seriously.

4. Do not take an adversarial posture.

5. Offer the family ongoing support and assurance of acceptance.

C. During the investigation of the incident, a proper response toward the accused and his or her family is critical. All BMPC workers should:

1. Make every effort to let the accused, and his/her family, know that the Session and staff are taking the allegations seriously.

2. Do not take an adversarial posture.

3. Offer the accused and the family of the accused support.

D. The Session will appoint a group to formulate a response to specific allegations in cooperation with DSS and police investigation. This group may review the completed incident reports, interview those involved, and prayerfully determine how to support the alleged victim and the accused. The Session and pastoral staff will provide assistance in finding professional counseling as needed.

A process of healing and restoration should be pursued if the accused confesses, is convicted of abuse, or is determined by the Session of wrongdoing. Scripture clearly states that forgiveness and reconciliation is the long-term goal in such a situation. A repentant abuser should be forgiven.

Future restoration to the church fellowship is a delicate issue. The feelings of the victim and his/her family must be considered. The abuser should go through a period of restoration that includes extensive counseling with a qualified therapist. Restoration could allow the abuser to return to the church fellowship at some point. However, an abuser will not be allowed to work with children or youth.

In the case where an allegation of abuse is found to be false, the pastor and Session will appoint a care team to work with the person who was accused to address restoration issues. They will also appoint a care team to work with the person who made the accusation and his/her family. In each case, the care team may help them find professional counseling.